

# Leadership Skills Necessary for Leaders to Avoid Challenges with Productivity and Motivation

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## Abstract

Organizations are proliferating, and the competition is getting competitive in the IT sales market. Leaders should try to keep their workforce motivated and productive by inspiring the workforce. The qualitative case study included the leadership skills necessary for inspirational leaders to avoid challenges with productivity and motivation from the teams within the IT sales sector in the Southern United States. The study was conducted with 15 participants from diverse backgrounds, including age, gender, nationality, job title, and position tenure. I conducted the study using coding from interviews and surveys by collecting data from the participants' experiences during a phenomenon, allowing me to view the phenomenon through thematic analysis using NVivo Pro 14. The emerging challenges were a strategy to implement new ways to support the issues where leaders were being more honest, providing support, better communication, showing empathy, and directing the business strategy. The process leads to job excitement and satisfaction for the employees. The leaders felt inspired when the teams were open to feedback, communicated often and honestly, and provided clear direction from leadership. The research paradigm was pragmatism, using a conceptual framework to better understand the organization used in this study.

## Keywords

Inspirational Leadership, Workforce Productivity, Leadership Motivation, Leadership Challenges, Leadership Skills

## 1. Introduction

Leaders in organizations ascend to the leadership position in many ways and not naturally. Lee and Lu (2022) mentioned that being an effective leader involves

providing a vision and developing and promoting autonomy, so employees feel secure. The leader of an organization must build a relationship with the individuals they choose to lead. Motivation to lead refers to the leader's ability and desire to lead others, which affects the desire to take on leadership training, roles, and responsibilities for leadership accomplishments (Auvinen et al., 2020). The relationship between the leader and follower instills trust, and the leader can inspire productivity and motivation based on trust. The dynamics between the leader and follower must operate effectively to accomplish success. Understanding what makes a great leader and serving in the position to lead can appear challenging.

The research reflected leadership skills and traits necessary for inspirational leaders to avoid challenges with motivation and productivity. I sought to provide a thorough understanding through the literature on inspirational leadership skills and challenges while motivating followers' productivity. My focus area was IT sales across the Southern United States. IT leaders must drive businesses to meet organizational initiatives and boost revenue, especially in the sales industry. Keeping followers motivated to stay productive is challenging when leadership lacks the inspiration to keep morale high.

The findings from the study revealed that leaders must build inspiration through leadership skills such as trust, honesty, effective communication, and support to motivate and keep the workforce productive. Leaders must show the support followers need regarding their development and growth. In addition, the findings showed that leaders need to feel a sense of belonging to the organization and understand its growth strategy to promote productivity and motivation in their teams. Leaders need to feel connected to the teams so that the relationship is mutual and an understanding of how to accomplish organizational objectives exists.

Qualitative researchers focus on people's experiences, perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs to understand why they do what they do (Keith et al., 2022). Danford (2023) mentioned that taking a pragmatic perspective to understand the difference between qualitative and quantitative includes quantitative numbers and qualitative incorporates words to communicate the findings and individual experiences. Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) stated that pragmatism describes concrete real-world issues and does not get involved with clashes on the nature of reality. Kelly and Cordeiro explained how positivism, post-positivism, postmodernism, constructivism, and pragmatism paradigms affect how the world people view and perceive reality. Kaushik and Walsh (2019) mentioned that researchers use paradigms to solve specific research problems, and each paradigm has a different outlook on research strategies, such as axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ethnography allows the researcher to examine patterns of group activities, behaviors, and language over a period (Danford, 2023).

Motivating productivity could appear challenging for leaders who lack the necessary skills. Section 1 of the single case study includes background on leadership challenges in inspiring the motivation and productivity of the workforce. The

problem statement reflected insights into the specific challenge in the industry and location, while the purpose statement replicated another perspective on research to understand the challenge. The research questions included guidance on the data collection process, followed by the theoretical framework connected with the theory. The definition of terms is to guide the reader along with the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The concluding section of the research is an academic review of the literature on leadership styles, skills, and challenges with productivity and motivation to conclude the section.

Leaders in organizations take on the role of leaders or ascend to a position of leadership through multiple pathways, including ascending to a position of leading followers. Zyglidopoulos (2021) mentioned that choosing leaders can occur based on appropriate criteria linked to leadership capabilities. Lu et al. (2022) stated that multicultural experience can align with leaders' leadership effectiveness. Leaders gain leadership experience through previous roles or may acquire them on the job as they progress into leadership roles. Prestige-oriented leaders, who thrive on admiration by their followers, assist with conflict to show the importance of positive working relationships (Ohtsubo & Yamaura, 2022). Understanding the skills or traits that make a leader strong can appear complicated, but research shows that leaders need specific characteristics and abilities to gain success in their roles. Zyglidopoulos (2021) stated that selecting rulers or leaders based on other criteria unrelated to effective leadership can appear detrimental to leadership and may or may not have the necessary skills. Yu et al. (2022) stated that resilience benefits individuals and organizations regarding leadership, job performance, well-being, and leadership capabilities. Lu et al. (2022) mentioned that leadership could be effective if the leader communicates competently, elevating their status. Effective leadership, inspiring motivation, and productivity are leadership skills and traits critical for successful leaders. The leadership skills necessary to lead can appear challenging if not instilled in the leader because of demanding environments (Yu et al., 2022).

Understanding the specific skills needed for inspiration is another challenge leaders face for effectiveness. Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) stated that leaders who work on developing intellect cannot foster inspiration and motivation from their followers, which results in low productivity. How can leaders stay motivated and inspiring enough for the people they lead? Inspirational leaders could compel followers to achieve and produce more by acknowledging their efforts for the overall success of the tasks. Levesque-Côté et al. (2021) mentioned that managers with a higher motivation profile present a higher level of job satisfaction and commitment to the organization's success. Not all leaders can lead without the necessary skills; obtaining those skills is challenging for leaders if they are unwilling to develop and learn new leadership skills.

The understanding of leadership theories such as leadership member (a) exchange (LMX), (b) inspirational leadership, and (c) transformational leadership helped me connect how the lack of leadership skills has a direct impact on produc-

tivity and motivation. Che et al. (2021) stated that leadership member exchange is a relationship formed between leaders and followers that relates to how, over time, the exchange is the focus of the relationship. Breevaart and Zacher (2019) stated that transformational leaders are effective with their leadership style by leading with inspiration and intellect and supporting the followers. Tarkang et al. (2022) mentioned that a high LMX relationship between the leader and follower leads to higher productivity and motivation. Practical and inspirational leaders understand that the correct skill set to lead drives motivation and productivity, which is critical to organizational leadership success.

### **1.1. Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative single case study method was to provide another perspective on the driving forces behind the lack of inspirational leadership in the technology industry and the effect on motivation and productivity across the Southern United States. Conducting research in the technology sales area regarding inspirational leadership reflected on the leadership skills gap the leaders are facing. I sought to contribute and assist readers with a clear understanding of the leadership strategy for inspiring and leading a team. I investigated whether specific leadership traits, skills, and capabilities were related to leadership style, motivation, and increased productivity across the Southern United States. Sales managers are a key demographic to draw upon to understand the training and development needed to help them become better leaders.

### **1.2. Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

RQ1. To what extent do leaders fail at being inspirational and effective at motivating their teams?

RQ2. How do leaders demonstrate empathy and trust in their leadership capabilities to inspire employees to be productive?

RQ3. What leadership skills or traits were necessary for leaders to acknowledge exceptional performance leading to team motivation and productivity?

The questions in the case study are open-ended to allow the leaders and the teams to thoroughly assess the leader's strengths through the team's perspective using a conversational, flexible, and structured approach (Turner & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). The first question, RQ1- To what extent do leaders fail at being inspirational and effective at motivating their teams? I presented an open-ended question to understand to what extent leaders fail to motivate teams effectively. An important factor in determining employee satisfaction and performance is the relationship they share with the supervisor (London et al., 2023). The second question, RQ2. How do leaders demonstrate empathy and trust in their leadership capabilities to inspire employees to be productive? I tried to understand if trust and empathy were necessary leadership skills for inspiring a team's productivity. The question could help the reader understand if trust is an appropriate leadership

skill to drive productivity. The third question, RQ3 – What leadership skills or traits were necessary for leaders to acknowledge exceptional performance leading to team motivation and productivity? I sought to understand and provoke thoughts about the leadership skills necessary to drive team performance, which leads to motivation and productivity.

### **1.3. Significance of Study**

The significance of the study was that it correlated with IT sales leaders in the Southern United States not having the experience and skill sets to inspire and lead and challenges with follower motivation and productivity by not having the necessary skills. The literature viewed in the next section will provide detailed information about diverse types of leadership and the skills necessary to lead and be inspirational. The goal of this study included finding a gap in the relationship between inspirational leaders and the skillsets needed for inspiration and driving productivity and motivation. Understanding how they are transactional and working together was critical in connecting.

### **1.4. Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Yaw and Serrano (2022) stated that assumptions, limitations, and delimitations help shape leadership competence in research by providing a structural approach to understanding how the dynamics of leadership work. The research consisted of all three to help understand the views before the research began and the limitations of what the research could control in specific outcomes. The delimitation in this case study was that the study only included one organization.

The first assumption was that the participants in the case study were all truthful about the information they shared on the surveys. The participants must be truthful in their feedback so that the results do not show biases and are. Therefore, I retrieved factual data to conclude the study. The second assumption was that the organization had effective, inspirational leaders who currently had no issues with productivity and motivation among the teams they led. Mayfield et al. (2021) stated that leaders who have a positive relationship with their employees understand the importance of leadership styles on productivity and motivation. Leaders who lack the skill set to inspire others will have challenges with productivity and motivating their workforce. The third assumption was that a lack of inspirational leadership often causes challenges with productivity and motivation. Duarte et al. (2021) stated that authentic leaders who inspire and motivate others increase results in productivity throughout the organization. Leaders who inspire and can drive productivity can create a culture of trust and productivity.

The first limitation in this case study was that the sample size of the population would be among two leaders in the organization and thirty individuals on the teams they lead, which limited the population from getting a more accurate result. Hunziker and Blankenagel (2024) stated that a single case study is a holistic picture of the unit analysis of a single individual, group, process, event, or organiza-

tion, where the researcher examines the data related to the subject studied. The population must be sufficiently large and appropriately analyzed to draw accurate conclusions from the data. A larger population can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The second limitation was that the case study relied on a survey that occurred during a specific time to make a correlation and explain the case study results. [Asenahabi \(2019\)](#) mentioned that a narrative method chronologically tells the view of individuals, and the researcher shares the narrative that combines participants in the results. For accuracy, the facts must align with the reality of the participants. Using multiple points in time may result in more findings needed for the case study. The third limitation of this case study was that the location was only in the Southern United States, which left out a large population, making the case study only valid for a particular section of the United States and not representing the entire population of IT sales. [Asenahabi \(2019\)](#) mentioned that a case study is an in-depth analysis that allows the researcher to understand how to conduct the research, whether on an animal, person, organization, group, or industry. A larger population could result in more findings, which can add credible validation to the data and yield factual results.

The case study delimitations only focused on inspirational leadership and how it affects productivity and motivation. [Breevaart and Zacher \(2019\)](#) stated that transformational leaders are effective with their leadership style by leading with inspiration and intellect and supporting their followers. Using other examples of leadership styles can impact the study by broadening the search range for conducting the case study and can invite more possibilities for different outcomes and understanding of the relationship between leader and follower. The study delimitates me, focusing on leadership obtainment and capabilities in IT organizations that sell or market products in the Southern United States. [Benlahcene et al. \(2022\)](#) mentioned that leadership development and training in organizations worldwide are critical for leaders to influence growth, productivity, and profit. The study only reflected one industry, which affected the case study by not having other sources of truth and experiences in similar industries to compare for accuracy in results.

## 2. Review of Academic Literature

### 2.1. Leadership Practices

Diverse leadership styles that leaders use include autocratic, authoritative, ethical, transformational, and servant leadership, which ties into what it means to be a learning organization ([Baltazar & Franco, 2023](#)). The practices leaders take when holding these leadership styles can shape how their followers perceive them and their leadership capabilities. [Baltazar and Franco \(2023\)](#) mentioned that studies showed that leadership is usually comprised of two groups: studying behaviors and the characteristics or leadership traits and their ability to influence a group. Promoting trusting relationships is what leaders strive for to assist them with enabling cooperative behaviors from their employees. [Bande et al. \(2020\)](#) mentioned

that employees perceive supervisors as having a high tolerance for trust and integrity, which results in favorable employee exchanges. The author explained the two main dimensions of trust, the first being the capacity to be vulnerable and the second expecting favorable treatment from others (Bande et al., 2020). Leaders' ability to communicate effectively by showing inclusion, collaboration, and intellectual deference eventually built trust and contributed to the team's overall satisfaction, which promoted trusting relationships (Soderberg & Romney, 2022). Encouraging followers to succeed could contribute to leaders gaining cooperation from their followers to drive productivity and motivation.

Encouraging followers to succeed is essential in helping the organization maintain its competitive advantage and by supporting the leader through staying engaged using effective communication (Ralon et al., 2021). Thanh and Tran (2023) stated that leaders should allow their employees to be creative to promote productivity and competitive advantage. If appropriately managed, talent could be an employer's main asset and strategy in producing the necessary outcomes (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). Employees can exert their energy and creativity when they receive positive and constructive feedback from their leader and peers, which amounts to employee creativity (Lee & Kim, 2021). Providing positive feedback from the leader to the employees creates a leader-employee dynamic that supports the relationship enough to foster innovative behaviors and drive creativity, job autonomy, and motivation (Lee et al., 2021). Thuan and Thanh (2020) mentioned that leaders' work-related information sharing allows knowledge about work performed by employees, improves relationship cooperation, and motivates ideas.

Kuntadi et al. (2023) indicated that employees were the optimal resource capable of driving other resources needed for the organization and, when optimized, elevated organizational aspirations. Critics could argue about how creativity and encouragement played against each other in motivation and productivity when trying to implement favorable outcomes to the organization (Thanh & Tran, 2023). Transformational and inclusive leadership motivates engagement to support the employees for knowledge sharing and foster well-being and proactivity toward the idea of knowledge sharing in organizations (Wu & Lee, 2020). Thanh and Tran (2023) shared insights on how organizations sharing information promoting knowledge sharing can heighten more significant innovation and employee willingness to work and collaborate with their peers. Leadership and knowledge sharing were key organizational components to foster innovation and effectiveness (Le & Do, 2023).

Self-sacrificial leaders should encourage and promote knowledge sharing so that the employees feel in control and not fear losing their power and knowledge ownership (Su et al., 2022). Le and Do (2023) mentioned that issues with hoarding knowledge and not sharing information could lead to organizational dysfunction and challenges with development. Responsible leadership is a leader's ability to lead, communicate, empower, and engage their teams to create positive change (Lin et al., 2020). Leaders who cannot create an environment where knowledge is

shareable would have a tough time with the team accepting their trust and leadership practices (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). Being inspirational could be an issue for a leader trying to get their team to work together to foster productivity and motivation (Alvi, 2022). Avoiding this leadership practice should only enhance the team's performance capabilities.

## 2.2. The Problem with Leadership Practices

Inspiration is a motivational state that brings awareness to an individual's self-vision or something of value critical in human capital to meet organizational goals where inspiration is necessary in any aspect of life (Acquah et al., 2021). The incapability of being an inspirational leader could play a role in shifting employees' attitudes to a place of dysfunction, which can slow down productivity and harm motivation. Effective communication is critical for organizational growth, and leaders must level their communication and speak to all employees across the organization (Agustini et al., 2022). Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) stated that leaders who work on developing intellect cannot foster inspiration and motivation from their followers, which results in low productivity. Inspirational motivation could improve performance in the organization when leaders treat employees fairly, which could promote participation in the team, focusing on challenges (Alvi, 2022).

Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) also suggested that leaders who were inspirational exuded passion, which encouraged performance for team motivation and keeping engagement at the center of collective goals. Khan et al. (2022) mentioned that these types of leaders helped their followers with their behaviors; these leaders assisted them with their performance. The study's results showed a direct connection between leadership and motivation, indicating that inspirational leaders play a significant role in achieving productivity and motivation. Lack of innovation and growth could harm the organization, leading to no desire for new ideas around policies, programs, or development (Lei et al., 2020). Leaders could also harm motivation and productivity if inspiration is missing from their leadership capabilities to get employees to feel inspired (Ameen et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership skills that promote accountability and self-reflection correlate to a positive relationship between leadership skills needed to influence organizational productivity (Adiela et al., 2022). Leadership development has become a challenge for organizations as the world changes and the need for new leadership emerges globally. Leadership development has captured the attention of scholars and practitioners and contributed to research and advanced development around the topic (Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020). Leaders who are engaging in their workforce, emphasizing the importance of leadership, see increases in employee work performance, learning, and behaviors that foster motivation and productivity (Rahmadani et al., 2020). The younger leaders in the study had more issues with their leadership capabilities and needed development, which played a factor in promoting productivity among their followers.

Ocho et al. (2021) stated that determining the effectiveness of any organization is by the quality of the leaders whose skills and competencies navigate them through challenging times as an organization. Organizational leaders must constantly develop innovation to meet business challenges because of global competition (Afsar & Umrani, 2020). Performance and motivation are critical components of human performance and can significantly affect a business's financial success (Mamun & Khan, 2020). Management, teamwork, and collaboration were among the skills needed for leaders to influence and inspire others to be productive and not cause concern for low motivation.

Leadership challenges include low motivation, which is difficult when leaders are trying to gain the trust of their followers. Leaders who utilize agile practices are capable of psychological empowerment and support. The leader can be a key source of employee creativity, which drives innovative behaviors and project performance (Malik et al., 2021). Leaders must lead in a way that shows empathy, sensitivity, and trust so their followers can return the same sentiment to continue producing (De Cremer, 2020). A leader must produce outcomes that are in alignment with the business, and research shows no true approach to developing leaders on motivation, which is difficult if the leader does not have the capabilities to motivate individuals (Gulati et al., 2022). Leaders who use their influence effectively can empower their employees' creativity, which enhances company outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2021). The authors explained that motivation comes from within; leaders cannot impose from the outside and can create conditions where employees can motivate themselves (Gulati et al., 2022).

Since internal motivation plays a critical role in leadership effectiveness, leaders should encourage their followers to believe in themselves and the leader, creating a positive perception of the leader-follower dynamics (Auvinen et al., 2020). Leadership occurs in many forms and is critical to the organization's overall success, and effective leaders motivate by inspiring employees and ensuring high satisfaction (Todăriță et al., 2023). Identified motivation relates to a behavior created because of a value or importance to a particular activity (Eide et al., 2020). Leaders must exemplify the meaning of motivation through their actions. What leaders say matters to their followers, and if the leader preaches kindness and honesty and then turns around and steals, then the leader is not truthful. Motivational leaders must gain the trust of their followers to lead strategically. As organizational administrators invest significant resources in training and developing their leaders, leaders must engage, motivate, and retain their employees (Moore & Ahmed, 2021). Coaching, communication, and inspiration are other leadership behaviors and skills management should own to motivate others (Musleh, 2021). Transformational leadership behaviors increase employees' commitments and make their chances of leaving the organization minimal, which could relate to high motivation among the team (Fernet et al., 2020).

Fear is another challenge that managers and leaders face. Leaders rely heavily on their experience and expertise as they progress; their leadership role progresses

in the relationships they create (Moore & Ahmed, 2021). Leaders thought forceful and demanding personalities to get their message heard impacted employee well-being and organizational performance, which could lead to demotivation (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Fear is a demotivating factor in an organization and can also be self-defeating, leading to emotional distress and exhaustion, creating an environment for less motivation (Aleassa, 2023). Fear as a leadership trait may work briefly, but eventually, the leader needs to earn the employees' commitment.

### 2.3. Theories

Various leadership styles exist, and their characteristics and behavior can define a great leader. Leaders excel in their roles based on their capabilities. At times, we as followers wondered how the leader could provide coaching, collaboration, empowerment, and learning, all the leadership skills necessary to lead (Zada, 2022). Organizational relationships between leaders and followers are critical for success (Comstock et al., 2021). Leadership styles are ways that leaders lead and can appear in various distinctive styles, such as transformational, servant, and inspirational leadership. Leadership theories can go further to explain the relationship between the leadership style, and it is the relationship to the follower, which suggests leadership is not a one-way process (Psychogios & Dimitriadis, 2021). Transformational leadership theory and leadership member exchange (LMX) are two leadership theories that assist a leader in understanding the distinction between being a leader and their role with their team. Leadership member exchange explains how the relationships developed and formed between formal leaders and those they lead (Comstock et al., 2021).

Employees exposed to multiple changes in their work environment must adapt to new ways of working and create innovative ideas. Employee emphasis is on the need for e-skills for growth stimulation because of technological changes, including cloud computing (Gkika et al., 2020). Leaders deciding on how they want to lead and influence employee behaviors in the organization focus on having strategic leadership as a skillset coupled with information technology influencing team performance (Agnihotri & Misra, 2023). Agnihotri and Misra focused on the emotional, behavioral, and psychological impacts of technology and managerial competencies to lead in organizations. Transactional and transformational leadership requires followers to collaborate with their leaders to succeed.

Davis and Thilagaraj (2022) mentioned that transformational leadership transforms individuals and communities to make better life changes. Leaders using this leadership style must inspire and intellectually stimulate others and go beyond their interests to lead and motivate others (Alhamidi, 2022). When leaders fully motivate their followers, they lead by example, which can inspire the team. In survey results, Danesh and Huber (2021) posited that learning from leaders was amazingly effective and that conflict was the most reported leadership skill desired. During the pandemic, leaders could become change agents and effect change needed in organizations (Geerts et al., 2021). Leaders had to adapt to

change and new standard operating procedures while leading through a challenging time and keeping the business running as usual. [Davis and Thilagaraj \(2022\)](#) stated that transformational leaders are intellects who motivate their employees through behaviors that drive results for the organizations they lead.

Employees like the feeling that they can innovate, share knowledge, and express working ideas with each other, which can help drive productivity and organizational collaboration ([Pratiwi et al., 2023](#)). Innovative work behavior consists of the development of many current ideas, technologies, and techniques that help align business procedures and ways of working ([Islam et al., 2024](#)). When implemented correctly, innovation allows the organization to become viable and accepted, leading to success. [Afsar and Umrani \(2020\)](#) mentioned that employees universally prefer transformational leadership, and that the leader-and-follower relationship should work but suggest that the relationship condition poses challenges. The authors also stated that transformational leaders can guide employees past their interests and motivate them to achieve the organizational vision. Leaders who portray excellent leadership practices can enhance collaboration and engagement, reducing communication errors ([Danesh & Huber, 2021](#)). The leader then creates the mentorship needed and supports a culture that can help with influencing and engagement related to innovation.

Transformational leadership can vary over days within the same leader and have different outcomes like trust, satisfaction, and work enthusiasm for the people they lead ([Bojovic & Jovanovic, 2020](#)). Leaders can have days off, and their behavior can differ daily based on their leadership style. An important task for leaders is to attend and show they are in control to assist their followers to the best of their ability ([Wang et al., 2023](#)). Leaders are transformational when they show engagement, which relates to innovative work behaviors and task performance ([Gemeda & Lee, 2020](#)). For this study, when transformational leadership was high, the followers could see higher performance ratings because they were more engaged by their leadership capability as inspirational and motivating in leading. Transformational leaders are effective with their leadership style by inspiring and intellectually stimulating their employees to enhance their job performance ([Lai et al., 2020](#)). Trust and loyalty in a leader are significant in transformational leadership and can explain the high performance of their followers. However, this leadership style can sometimes hurt the leader's approach to challenging the status quo ([O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020](#)). The interaction between leader and follower is critical and rewarding to the follower at times, but it can become an issue and disrupt the team dynamics if not appropriately managed.

The leader-member exchange focuses on the employer-leader relationship. [Yıkılmaz and Sürücü \(2023\)](#) mentioned that LMX is a contributor to employee creativity and creates an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their creative ideas and behaviors with leaders. The employee establishes a long trusting relationship with the leader, and in return, the relationship builds to where the employee feels that the trust allows creativity to flourish ([Kleynhans et](#)

al., 2022). When a leader shows confidence and respect for an employee, that employee is likely to exceed their standard job duties as outlined in their position. Liang et al. (2022) mentioned how leadership member exchange relates to authoritarian leadership and how researchers often choose this form of leadership to explain the relationship between leader and follower. Leaders demanding conditions and constraints on employees can negatively influence their motivation and engagement, especially when the employees do not understand the constraints (Coo et al., 2021). The low-quality relationships formed between leader and follower add a level of complexity because of the transactional exchanges based on employee contracts. When LMX is high, the actions between leader and follower become a rewards and benefits system in which the employee can become high performers (Wang et al., 2019). LMX can become extremely rewarding to the employees because they can elevate in their positions, receive challenging positions, and perform, even seeing pay for performance as an exchange offered and given by the employee when LMX is high (Xie et al., 2023). The relationship between leader and follower occurs through mutual trust, and the followers support the leader. The higher the LMX between the leader and the follower, the better the chances that the leader and follower dynamics will continue to be strong and growth opportunities for challenging positions can exist for the followers (Rijanti et al., 2020). The leader must provide the support and trust needed for employee productivity.

Managers can help nurture their staff and build relationships with others when high leadership members exchange presence, leading to trust and support for leader admiration (Vasset et al., 2023). Employees work with minimal supervision when the LMX is high, and the leader gives the employees what they need for the leadership theory to work. Once given the freedom of minimal supervision, employees will soon build trust and gain more confidence in their abilities as managers. Tarkang et al. (2022) mentioned that when the LMX relationship between leader and follower is high, it leads to higher productivity and motivation. Motivation and productivity connect because they can succeed when LMX is high, and the leader displays great confidence in building relationships between leader and follower (Scandura & Meuser, 2022).

### 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology frames how the various parts of the research content will correlate to portray the data collected throughout the study for the investigator. I used a flexible design single case study, which allowed me to use multiple methods such as interviews, surveys, or observation to collect the data needed to investigate a phenomenon that occurred. Methodological triangulation can also include quantitative and qualitative methods using specific methods in collaboration with triangulation (Santos et al., 2020). Triangulation in the research using theory and methodology should connect the dots between the information collected from the participants and the theories to help make the correlation and

draw the conclusion.

This qualitative research included a flexible design and methods to understand if leaders who lack inspirational skills have challenges with motivation and productivity in technology sales organizations. The study involved research design, methodology, and the purpose behind the research laid out in the beginning. The role and action the researcher took to conduct the study have also been shared, along with a robust discussion on bracketing to avoid biases and the chosen research triangulation for data validation once completed. Triangulation can include mixed methods to assist with finding truths in the research (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021).

### 3.1. Population and Sampling

The case study included individuals who hold leadership roles, such as senior managers and employees involved in IT sales organizations throughout North Carolina. The individual's primary responsibility is to guide a team of professionals. The participants came from various ethnicities, educational backgrounds, genders, and leadership experiences to ensure that the sample size of leaders and upper management reflects a blend of unique perspectives and diversity. Providing a rationale for justifying the sample size in a case study is essential to helping the researcher clarify and add valuable insights (Lakens, 2022). I selected the population based on leadership qualifications, considering diversity and experience in leadership capabilities. Time and resources were challenging during my research. Van Haute (2021) suggested that the researchers collect a sample as a subset of units from the population. The sample size included 15 participants to avoid biases that may occur. The researchers should allow flexibility in the sample size, and variations in the number of participants could introduce potential errors in correlation, mean squared error, and standard deviation (Vozzi et al., 2021).

The optimal selection process for generating a population is best when it includes broad coverage of the sample variations (Hršak et al., 2022). The case study population comprised 15 leaders, senior managers, managers, and employees working for IT sales organizations across the southern United States. The population from a study can create boundaries around the scope of the research and provide context cues (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The boundaries of the population from the research can include race, gender, age, religious status, occupation, and number of employees (Williamson et al., 2022). The employees met the criteria in the sampling process within the parameters of the case study. The managers and the employees experienced and encountered the known phenomenon. The primary population of the case study included senior managers and first-level managers because they are the organization's leaders with the most experience with the phenomenon. The criteria for selecting the primary population reflected the study's research questions. The secondary population of this case study was the subordinates of the organization who reported to the leaders, senior managers, and first-line managers.

The research sample size ranged from 15 participants who all work for an IT sales organization. The sampling in this research consisted of Leaders and Upper Management from diverse demographics. The sampling method for this research was purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher deliberately chooses the participants based on the criteria relevant to the research questions created (Vidhi, 2021). The participants also consist of participants from diverse backgrounds who experienced some leadership challenges that may have disrupted motivation and productivity in the group. The population can create boundaries around the scope of the research and can provide context cues for the reader (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Employing a large, diverse group of participants as part of the selection process allowed me to broaden the scope of information from the individuals. The recruitment strategy in this study included individuals needed for the research based on criteria. My plan in this case study was to gain access to the selected population by seeking permission from the participants. My advantage was that I had access through networking with other colleagues in the same field of research. The small sample size of 7 leaders in upper management allowed me to understand the research questions.

The second sample group of 8 employees, who were given a survey, allowed me to ask direct, closed-ended questions to assist in the data triangulation and find a correlation between the two samples. The sample sizes were adequate for me to identify themes in the research data.

### **3.2. Data Collection Plan**

My data collection plan in this case study was to collect information on the participants' behaviors, feelings, memories, and other sentiments or actions that occurred where the leader who was managing the employees or had direct authority over them had encountered. I conducted interviews in person in a structured format so that the information collected through word of mouth between the researcher and the participant was valid (Mwita, 2022). I also collected data by observing the participants. I used my senses to collect the data through seeing, touching, and listening, allowing me to focus on the phenomenon observed during the session. The last method of collecting data was through questionnaires or surveys to ask open-ended questions, extracting the most information from the participants based on their experiences. The participants clarified their answers to get their points across. Protecting the personal information of participants in this study was critical. Creating a data management plan helps to keep the participants' information secure (Strydom et al., 2023).

Gathering information is crucial for conducting research through primary or secondary data collection methods (Mazhar et al., 2021). Research data should be detailed enough to give the researcher the right amount of information needed to support findings in the study, and having the correct methods, goals, study scope, and sample size necessary for conducting the research allows for a clear outcome to achieve the research objectives (Mwita, 2022). The research plan was also ap-

appropriate because it includes the right strategy for securing and housing the data once completed. The data management process ensured the planning for the collected data, and management followed the appropriate privacy and compliance to keep the data integrity in check. After I completed the interviews, I entered the recorded information in NVivo Pro 14 to assist with transcribing and analysis.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

I used NVivo Pro 14 to evaluate and analyze the interview and questionnaire data by allowing the software to recognize patterns from the code created. Researchers commonly use the NVivo Pro 14 software because of its ability to consolidate data into less wording, making it easier to find common theme nodes. I could decide on which data units to encode and which data units to extract throughout the process. NVivo Pro 14 allowed the categorizing of the codes by creating labels, which helped with organization and the analysis of the data and storing, which eventually validated the findings from the research and data collected. I used the main interview questions and questionnaire as the catalyst for the data collection and analysis with the assistance of NVivo Pro 14 to validate and provide evidence of trends in the data collected. I coded the data used and examined the frequency of the patterns to draw on the themes created in detail from the complex datasets.

## 4. Presentations of the Findings

The participants' interview questions and questionnaires provided insight into the qualitative research thematic analysis, and the themes and patterns found during the in-person interviews can align with the ideas or themes presented during that specific time (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). With assistance from NVivo Pro 14, I captured the responses for similarities and notated them by themed nodes. Triangulation combines data sources, investigators, methodologic approaches, and theory, which is used to combine all three sources to study the outcome (Vivek et al., 2023). In this case study, I used multiple instruments like interviews, questionnaires, and surveys to triangulate the data collected. Triangulation is proper for validity by using multiple sources to drive collaborative findings based on the code and themes from the data. I captured qualitative data from the second sample group: the employees. The survey data I created included closed-ended questions relating to leaders' and upper management's capabilities to inspire, which can cause issues with motivation and productivity. I used bracketing to avoid biases in the data collection process, such as interviews and surveys. Not using persuasive tactics to solicit a specific response helps to obtain the desired outcome based on self-perception (Thomas & Sohn, 2023). The themes emerged as (a) low morale and being uninspired, (b) lack of communication, (c) no clear direction, and (d) demonstrating empathy. In addition, the themes emerged as (a) demonstrating trust, (c) being supportive, (c) leadership skills necessary for motivation, and (d) necessary for productivity. The themes listed emerged from the participants in the survey and interviews. The participants were various individuals such as manag-

ers, senior managers, CEOs, and employees of the organization who shared valuable information for the study. The framework in this case study consists of two theories: transformational leadership theory and leadership member exchange. The constructs and theories enable the researcher to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the leadership skills necessary for leaders to overcome challenges related to productivity and motivation.

**Theme: Low Morale and Being Uninspired**

This theme aligned with the anticipated, discovered theme that Inspirational Leaders Drive Productivity and Motivation, meaning that when employees feel inspired by their leader, they will be more empowered to produce more in the workplace. Throughout the study, multiple participants mentioned in their responses that when their leader inspires them, or if the leader is inspired, it drives productivity and motivation to be the best version of themselves at work.

**Theme: Lack of Communication**

The theme of lack of communication aligns with the concept mentioned earlier in this research: inspirational leadership drives productivity and demonstrated through interviews and surveys conducted with participants that this leadership skill is necessary for inspiration and productivity. Participants 3 and 4 mentioned in their interviews that leadership failure happens when leaders are not communicating effectively with their teams, which causes their teams to be less inspired and lack motivation to work.

**Theme: No Clear Direction**

This theme aligns with the construct that inspirational leadership drives productivity because some participants believe that not having a clear direction where they can see the future or the direction the company is taking fails to inspire their productivity and motivation. Kultsum et al. (2023) found that leaders who show clear direction communicate with clear goals and team recognition, boosting performance outcomes and ensuring team alignment and motivation. Participant 7 mentioned that effective leaders can inspire their teams by fostering open communication, setting clear goals, recognizing small and large achievements, and having a clear direction in where the organization they represent is going. The same participant also felt that misalignment and inconsistent follow-through from key stakeholders made it hard for commitment to clear directives and communication failure.

**Theme: Demonstrating Empathy**

The ability to demonstrate empathy and trust can assist a leader in understanding how they can support the team they lead and can be a leadership trait that leaders own to allow them to lead effectively. This theme aligns with the concept of effective leadership. Several participants thought that empathy and trust was a skillset and trait that leaders should have and demonstrate when leading. The participants from an employee point of view also thought empathy and trust is needed for productivity and motivation throughout the organization and on the team. The participants also mentioned in the interviews and in the surveys that

empathy and trust portrayed a feeling of support.

#### **Theme: Demonstrating Trust**

Trust aligns with the concept that inspirational leadership drives productivity. Trust was a common skill many participants found necessary for the leaders. Employees felt that trust should be a leadership skill leaders needed to make them feel inspired, while leaders felt that trust was a skill that they should have to inspire their teams to be more productive in their daily tasks to drive business goals. Participant 2 mentioned in their interview that leaders who demonstrate trust delegate responsibilities, encourage autonomy, and avoid micromanaging their teams, which shows a level of trust in their employees.

#### **Theme: Being Supportive**

This theme focuses on and aligns with the construct of effective leadership. The coding in this section allowed leaders and employees to find some synergies when it came to the support needed for them to understand each other and to build the trust and working relationship required to sustain a working and thriving organization. Researchers emphasized the value of supportive leadership in organizations and how it can be a critical skill for leaders to foster organizational productivity, employee satisfaction, and motivation. Supportive leadership can positively affect employees' attitudes and behavior in the workplace, which can be necessary for productivity and motivation (Dayanti et al., 2022).

#### **Theme: Leadership Skills Necessary for Motivation**

This theme aligns with the concept of leadership skills and motivation, meaning that leaders possess skills that allow them to excel in their roles and define their leadership styles and how they work with their teams (Helmold, 2021). The participants in this study all felt that multiple leadership skills and traits are needed for leaders to have to affect productivity and motivation throughout the organization. A couple of the leadership skills mentioned and had the same response from manager and employee were trust, empathy, observance, honesty, thoughtfulness, good listening, and many others. Participant 6 mentioned in their interview that a good listener is a leadership skill needed by a manager so that they are able to observe and provide corrective feedback to the team they lead.

#### **Theme: Leadership Skills Necessary for Productivity**

This theme aligns with the concept, leadership skills and motivation. 14 and 8 participants mention in their survey that leaders must keep their teams productive by managing all aspects of the organization and making sure they are keeping the team engaged while being fair. The participant explained a time when the leader had a role as manager while trying to manage through a huge organizational shift that impacted multiple team members. Some of the team members were close, and they would eventually have their positions eliminated, while others were low performers.

#### **Findings**

The results provided insights into the approach used by the leader to motivate their teams and what the employees thought of what leadership skills the leaders should possess to make the relationship between leader and follower work. The

strategy and approaches to achieve the goals included but were collaborating, listening, communicating effectively, and showing fairness to the team to meet their needs so that the employees and leaders feel they can work together for motivation and productivity across the organization. The research questions allowed the participants to share information about the phenomena and their effects on their understanding of the situation. The open-ended research questions enticed the participants to share information on their experiences with leaders and how their leadership capabilities either created a sense of inspiration to inspire their working habits or created an atmosphere where employees felt low morale and energy. Some of the key findings from the research are that leaders must support their teams to develop trust, which enables the relationship between leader and follower to grow and strengthen. Leaders and followers must be honest and willing to communicate effectively to share ideas and learn from each other. Also, empathy goes a long way to understanding the leadership skills necessary to avoid challenges with productivity and motivation. Employees must feel that their leaders will be very understanding in times of need, like difficult challenges or personal issues, and provide support to show they value them.

#### **4.1. Application to Professional Practice**

Organizations are constantly growing, and the demand to produce is becoming more challenging with competition in the market as technology is changing the way we work in this digital era (Bencsik, 2020). The manager-employee relationship should strive to foster common ground to strengthen the team and motivate collaboration across the department to complete the work necessary. Innovative organizations should leverage leadership skills using technology as a partner to adapt and challenge competitiveness within the workforce to drive high results and motivate their employees while giving them the support needed to succeed (Hussain et al., 2023).

#### **4.2. Improving General Practices**

Productivity and motivation are critical for organizations to be competitive in the market, and how they achieve their advantage depends on the employees who trust their leadership capabilities. This study included in depth the challenges managers face in being able to inspire their employees to be productive while staying motivated. The perspective from both angles, the leader and the employee, shared ways to come together to build on the relationship for success. The findings revealed that managers feel uninspired when faced with challenges with direction from the organization and where the company is headed, along with not having clear communication from leadership, which makes room for frustration and feeling undervalued. The employees in the study found that to feel motivated and productive, they must feel trust, honesty, respect, support, development, and clear communication from the managers, which are what they look for when defining what a leader should possess.

The study concluded that leaders needed to support their employees and pay more attention to their concerns. One participant mentioned how their leader did not listen to their development needs, which made the participant less motivated to work on the team. [Tesmer and Oxenford \(2020\)](#) mentioned that a competitive leadership approach can heavily influence an employee's motivation by developing a meaningful purpose, sharing values, and building a relationship with the team. By relating to the employees and setting challenging goals for the employees, the relatedness from the leader creates competence, which drives the productivity and motivation of the employees higher. [Zia-ur-Rehman et al. \(2022\)](#) mentioned that understanding trust and team effectiveness contributes to how a team stays productive and motivated to work on a team.

The results also revealed that one of the major contributors to leaders who are inspirational and influence the team's ability to stay motivated and productive is trust. The leaders and the employees felt that trust was critical for the relationship, whether it was a skill set for the leader or the employee's understanding of a skill a leader should own. Trust can improve leadership practice by making the relationship between the leader and the employee more secure and building confidence in each other, so understanding leads to productivity. [Onoriode and Samuel \(2023\)](#) stated that trust in the team motivates better communication and stronger teamwork and improved overall team performance, leading to higher productivity and motivation. The team's psychological safety is critical for the leader to get what they expect out of the team. The team needs to feel safe that their actions and support, if required, exist and that they have someone to turn to if needed that they can confide in for that support ([Dimas et al., 2023](#)).

Another finding in this study that can improve general leadership practices is the notion of leaders being supportive of the overall development of employees. Employees want to ensure they gain valuable information that will help them advance in their careers on the job but also give them a sense that the leader cares whether they succeed. [Stein et al. \(2021\)](#) shared how supporting leaders improves leader-member exchange quality by reducing emotional exhaustion, which can keep the employees feeling uninspired. Active leaders can drive productivity and motivation across the organization by staying engaged with their employees and keeping them current with key communications to drive their productivity and motivation ([Agusta & Azmy, 2023](#)). Leaders can improve their leadership practices by following the corrective actions through research and understanding how to implement a strategy to see the success needed on the team.

### 4.3. Potential Implementation Strategies

Implementing strategies for leaders can create challenges if the leader is incapable of understanding the driving force behind low productivity and motivation is on the team. The leader must be willing to look at the team's current situation and develop a plan that will lead the team forward. Participant 6 mentioned in their interview, "employee engagement is critical to keep the team motivated and that

strategy seemed to work best in my situation.” Strategies like employee engagement, where the leader focuses on attracting and retaining talent through actively finding solutions where the employees can see working improvements by participating in events where the team is collaborating and working together, influence productivity (Zondo, 2020). Employee performance driving can drive significant outcomes that can determine the organization’s direction negatively or positively. Leaders who actively become involved in their workforce create a conducive work environment that enhances psychological safety and performance (Mansoor et al., 2022).

Another implementation strategy that leaders can use to leverage information found in this research is having clear and precise communications with the team to avoid any disconnect from expectations. Participant 7 shared, “Effective leaders can inspire their teams by fostering open communication, setting clear and achievable goals, and providing recognition for both small and large achievements.” A clear communication strategy can alleviate questions about job descriptions, activities, or work required to keep the business operating. Clear communication can enable the team to collaborate better and give the leader a sense of control while creating an environment for productivity (Hergueux & Kessler, 2022). While clear communication can assist a leader with productivity and motivation, the leader must ensure that the employees the leader must account for their actions.

The study concluded that through the participants and employees, leaders must show accountability for their actions, and the employees must account for their assigned work. One way that the IT leaders in this research can work on accountability is by holding the employees responsible for the products they sell. Adopting product ownership empowers the employees to make decisions and engages the stakeholders who own the product, but it also increases ownership throughout the organization (Wu et al., 2020). Another way to foster accountability that can align with the organization’s culture is to create specific products and project owners, which enables individual ownership. The leader’s ability to take feedback from the employees and foster a culture of accountability can align with ethical practices that pair well with the strategy taken on by the leader (Stauffer & Maxwell, 2020).

Implementing organizational strategies can be critical for the leadership in aligning with institutional pressures and managerial capabilities to foster and sustain growth through agile processes and decision-making (Bernardes & Ferreira, 2023). Strategy and product innovations can cost leaders countless days of critical and disrupted work if the alignment between the team and the leadership is not connecting. The leader sets the direction for the team, and the team depends on the leader to paint a vision of how they see the team’s growth and future (Andrews, 2023). The findings from the research revealed valuable strategies each leader used to get participation from their organization to increase productivity and motivation. Leaders must change their mindset to collaborative thinking, while the employees should try to stay engaged through the change.

#### 4.4. Recommendation for Further Study

Based on the findings from this research, a good portion of the participants stressed the need for the leaders and the employees to have a trusting relationship. The IT organizations where the participants were from for the research all shared a common theme of missing or wanting trust enforced more in the relationship between leader and employee. Trust was a theme throughout the study; therefore, it suggests that leaders should give trust a second look since it is a hot topic. Participant 9 from the study mentioned, “yes, when leaders trust and allow their employees the freedom to make decisions that will impact the organization, the team is able to execute and drive business quicker due to the removal of layers needed to make decisions.” Strategies like building trust that leaders use are something that will take time, and the leader should not expect overnight success because many factors involve communication and fostering collaboration that help team unity (Ritter, 2021). The participants shared the feeling of trust when the leaders allowed them to make decisions independently and empowered them to make challenging decisions. Driving business decisions quicker and faster allowed the leader to see that they were capable and could be trusted to make the decisions.

Another area that deserved a deeper dive into understanding how it impacted the participants in the study was the leaders being more empathetic and supportive to the employees in understanding that their support and development were a concern of theirs. Soomar (2020) mentioned how empathetic leaders gain the respect of their employees through the leaders’ actions in situations where the employees struggle and need support from the leader in making clear choices that support their growth and development”. Participant 5 mentioned in their survey, “Yes, my manager is caring, kind, empathic, trustworthy, and reliable to the team. We trust our leader, and his ability to be empathetic and trustworthy makes us want to sell more products because we know he will have our back.” The example from this participant showed how the leader was empathetic and can be trusted, which in return helped boost sales and revenue which stemmed from the leader’s ability to provide support when needed. Trust and empathy require more research, along with communications and how to help teams decipher what is important and how to avoid poor communication practices.

The study showed that communication was a big concern with leaders and employees in this study, which deserved more scrutiny in understanding why this area played a role in helping leaders with challenges with productivity and motivation. Participant 11 shared in their survey, “Yes, I remember a time when I felt particularly motivated by my manager. They showed strong communication and genuine appreciation for the team’s efforts, even during challenging times.” Researchers showed that when managers have face-to-face communication with their teams, it enhances efficiency and problem-solving, which contributes to better team productivity and motivation (Hicks, 2011). Communicating with the team with clear messaging can help the leaders and the team relationship grow, building a foundation for trust and honesty in relationship to goal attaining (Imam et al., 2022).

## 5. Summary and Conclusion

The study touched on multiple topics that helped form the overall conclusion. The topics reviewed were research design, methods, and triangulation, and I shared the paradigm used for the research with the methodology to address the research topic. Themes explored through data collection around leadership skills and traits, including behaviors in IT organizations, through phenomena shared by the participants. I used triangulation of the interviews, surveys, literature, and data collected to conclude from the results. The research framework laid out the strategy for me to implement, including a flexible single case study design in the Southern region.

The 15 participants from the IT sales organization consisted of the CEO, senior managers, line managers, and employees. The sample size was relevant to conduct a valid study. The sample size included making sure the makeup of the participants was from diverse backgrounds, including ages, gender, race, and tenure on the job. The study included information from the participants to explore the impact of the leaders' leadership capabilities. The research concluded that employees and leaders all strive for commonalities to ensure collaboration between the team and the leaders. Common themes about leadership skills and traits needed for productivity and motivation on the team were trust, honesty, respect, communication, and support. The leaders who owned these skills found that the team performed proficiently and performed tasks with little interruption.

Transformational leadership succeeds by letting teamwork and sharing ideas brought by the leaders, which was a plus in the leaders' capabilities in supporting motivation and productivity. The validity and reliability of the data were critical in assessing these findings about the leaders. They assisted with showing that I conducted the study without biases that could have made the conclusions appear false. The data analysis included using codes transformed into themes to help explain the outcomes, surveys, and interviews. The information from the participants was necessary to assist me in discovering what challenges emerged and what strategies could help solve the issues. Leaders and employees felt accomplished when unity existed among the teams and leaders purposefully delegated assignments. The participants shared valuable information about the leadership capabilities necessary to effectively lead an organization and team. The leaders and teams learned great lessons based on their experiences and the information shared. The diverse backgrounds and cultures all added unique working relationships, which complicated some of the issues with productivity and motivation. The leaders, at times, did not understand what the teams needed from them through support and empathy, which also complicated the dynamics. Working together to solve the issues made the leader and the teams they lead come together through shared experiences.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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